Identifying and Using Context Clues

**Classroom Examples of Identifying and Using Context Clues**

Context clues are clues to the meaning of a word that are contained in the text and the illustrations that surround it. Context clues can include definitions, examples, and restatements, as well as charts, pictures, and type features. Not all context clues are helpful as some can be misleading. When teaching students to use context clues, it is important to model the teacher’s own use of the strategy, provide students with time for guided practice, provide time for independent practice, and frequently remind students of when and how they can apply a strategy.

Baumann, J.E., Edwards, E.C., Boland, E., Olejnik, S. & Kame’enui, E.W. (2003). ***Vocabulary Tricks: Effects of instruction on morphology and context in fifth grade students’ ability to derive and infer word meaning***. American Educational Research Journal, 40, 447-494.

Armbruster, B., Lehr, F., & Osborn, J. (2001). ***Put Reading First: The Research Building Blocks for Teaching Children to Read***. Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement. National Institute for Literacy.

**1. Watts and Truscott (1996) suggest this five-step process for identifying meaning from context:**

* Identify the unknown word
* Look within the sentence to locate possible clues
* If necessary, look in the sentence just before and the one just after in which the unknown word appears.
* If a student thinks there are enough clues to take a guess at the word’s meaning, he or she should do so. Then check to see whether the guess makes sense.
* If a student remains “clueless,” then check another resource, such as the dictionary or a peer.

[Watts-Taffe, S. & Tuscott, D. ***Using What We Know about Language and Literacy Development for ESL Students in the Mainstream Classroom***. (2000). Language Arts, 77(3).]  
<http://faculty.washington.edu/smithant/Watts-Taffe%20and%20Truscott.pdf>

**2. Goerss, Beck, & McKeown (1999) pose another five-step process for using context clues:**

* Read the text and paraphrase the context.
* Have students explain what the text was about.
* Have students provide an initial notion of the unknown word’s meaning.
* Have students consider whether the context would allow other potential meanings.
* Have students summarize the information from the dialogue.

[Goerss, B. L., Beck, I. L., & McKeown, M. G. (1999). Increasing ***Remedial Students' Ability to Derive Word Meaning from Context***. Reading Psychology, 20 (2), 151-175.]